

Preference in Modern Standard English and Modern Standard Arabic: A Contrastive Analysis

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Introduction

English and Arabic have very important status throughout the world, since English (a Germanic language) is the language of the present development, and Arabic (a Semitic language) is the language of the Holy Qur'an. The present study highlights the concept of 'purpose' in MSE and MSA. This investigation aims to identify and compare the meaning of 'preference' in MSE and MSA to find out the aspects of similarity and difference in both languages. The study tries to identify, analyze, and contrast the semantic and the syntactic features of 'preference' in MSE and MSA. In addition to reveal the aspects of similarity as well as of difference in both languages.

In dealing with such an investigation, the researcher uses the Contrastive Analysis Approach which assumes that two languages could be compared in terms of their phonological systems, syntactic systems, writing systems, and cultural behavior. Below is the outline that is usually followed while doing CA:

- (1) *Description* of the two languages
- (2) *Selection* of certain areas or items of the two languages for detailed comparison.
- (3) *Comparison*, i.e., the identification of areas of difference and similarity.

(Al-Nasrawi, 2011: 6)

The scope of such a study is limited to the semantic (meanings) of purpose in both English and Arabic. It is also restricted to Modern Standard English and Modern Standard Arabic.

The researchers try to explain and analyze the confusion in this area of grammar faced by learners in both languages. It is hoped that this study will be a good guide for those who are interested in the field of scientific research, linguistics, textbook designers and teachers of English and Arabic at the same time.

Section one

1. Preference in English

1.1 Definition

The word prefer means 'like more' or 'like better' and the rejected alternative is introduced by a (to-phrase) or by a clause introduced by (rather than) which may be followed by an infinitive (with or without to) or an (ing- participle).

(Hornby, 1974: 655)

1.2 Preference constructions

Preference in English can be shown by the following constructions:

1.2.1 Prefer something/ to do/ doing

This verb can be used something to something else:

1- I prefer this coat to the coat you were wearing yesterday.

Prefer (to do/ doing) is used to say what we prefer in general:

2- I prefer driving to travelling by train.

3- I prefer to drive rather than travel by train. (Murphy, 1994: 116)

1.2.2 Rather than

According to Quirk et al (1985: 1118) clauses of preference are mainly introduced by subordinators like rather than. For example:

5- Rather than go there by air, I'd take the slowest train.

Subordinate clause of rather than may very occasionally take its own subject as in the example below:

6- Rather than you say anything, I would speak to the manager myself.

A rare and formal finite clause of preference occurs with putative (should):

7- Rather than she stand feel lonely, her friends arranged to take her with them on the trip.

In formal English, it is possible to use rather than.....would+ infinitive as in:

8- Rather than let him go to prison, I would pay him fine myself.

(Thomson & Martinet, 1986)

1.2.3 Would rather+ bare infinitive

Would rather has the same meaning of (would prefer to) in expressing 'preference' (Quirk et al, 1985: 142).

This construction may be followed by a (than) construction:

9- I'd rather stay in a house than in a hotel. (Swan, 2000: 158-159)

Would rather is used to show that one person would prefer another person to do something. It is also used in the past tense but the meaning is present or future not past (would rather+ subject+ past tense):

10- I'd rather you went home now.

11- Shall I open a window? – I'd rather you didn't. (Swan, 2001: 369-70)

1.2.4 Would prefer+ to infinitive (hypothetical prefer)

We use would (not will) with the verbs (to like, to love, to prefer) to show preference especially in offer:

12- 'Would you prefer tea or coffee?' 'Coffee, please.'

13- Would you like some tea or would you prefer coffee?

14- I'd love to be able to travel round the world. (Murphy, 1994: 114,116)

1.2.5 Comparative adjective (adj. + er/ more + adj.) + than

This construction which is used in the second part of a comparison, is used to show the meaning of 'preference':

15- My room is better/ cleaner than the one next door.

16- A scheduled flight is more expensive than a charter flight. (Alexander, 1997: 6, 28)

1.2.6 No better way/ example/ place etc.

One of its meaning, No better is used to say that something is the best. For example:

17- There is no better way of exploring the religion. (Longman, 2003: 130)

1.2.7 Do better

According to (Longman, 2003:130) this expression can be used to perform better or reach a higher standard, i. e., preference as in the following example:

18- We did better than all the other schools.

1.2.8 The sooner the better/ the bigger the better etc.

Each of the above mentioned expressions can be used to emphasize that you would prefer something to happen as soon as possible, want something to be as big as possible, for instance:

19- School finishes at the end of the week, and the sooner the better as far as I'm concerned.

20- The younger you start learning a language, the better you'll speak it.

(Longman, 2003: 130)

1.2.9 Go one better (than sb)

The sense of this phrase is to do something more successfully than someone else:

21- The following year Lewis went one better by winning the gold medal.

(Longman, 2003: 130)

1.2.10 Had better

Although the meaning of this modal idiom is advisability (Quirk et. al., 1985: 141), it may imply the meaning of 'preference' as in the following example:

22- We had/ 'd better leave soon. – Yes, we had/ 'd better.

1.2.11 Superlative adjective (the + adj. + est/ the + most + Adj.)

This form of an adjective expresses the highest degree (Hornby, 1974: 868):

23- John is the best player in the team.

24- John is most polite of the boys. (Quirk et. al., 1985: 468)

In the above two examples, John is preferred among the boys with regard to playing and politeness, i.e., 'preference'.

1.2.12 Would sooner

According to Quirk et. al. (1985: 142) this construction which is similar in meaning to would rather can express 'preference' (=.....would prefer.....) and may therefore be followed by a comparative construction beginning with (than):

25- I'd sooner live in the country than in the city.

1.2.13 Preference

This is the noun of the verb 'to prefer' and has the act of preferring. For instance:

26- I should choose this in preference to any other. (Hornby, 1974:656)

1.2.14 To better

When a verb, better is to be higher in quality, amount etc. than someone or something else:

27- His total of five gold medals is unlikely to be bettered. (Longman, 2003: 131)

1.2.15 Better: As a noun, better means something that is better, i.e., 'preference':

28- Which one is the better of the two books? (Hornby, 1974: 78)

1.2.16 So much the better

Such expression is used to say that something would be even better or bring even more advantages, e.g.:

29- If they can do them both at the same time, then so much the better.

(Longman, 2003:130)

1.2.17 In preference to sb/ sth

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary Language (2003:1288) this phrase means 'rather than', for example:

30- Use clear English in preference to technical language.

1.2.18 Give/ show (a) preference to sb/ sth

By give/ show (a) preference to, we mean to treat sb/ sth in a way that gives them an advantage over other people or things, e.g.:

31- In allocating housing, preference is given to families with young children.

(Longman, 2003: 1288)

1.2.19 Preferable (to sth/ to doing sth/ to do sth)

Such an adjective can be used to mean better or more suitable:

32- It would be preferable to employ two people, not one. (to do sth)

33- Anything was preferable to tense atmosphere at home. (to sth)

34- He finds country life infinitely preferable to living in the city. (to doing sth)

35- In warm weather, clothes made of natural fabrics are infinitely preferable. (= much better) (Longman, 2003: 1288)

1.2.20 Preferential

It gives an advantage to a particular person or group:

36- Don't expect to get a preferential treatment. (Longman, 2003: 1288)

1.3 Negation in preference

There are two kinds of negations related to 'preference' shown by (had better and would rather):

(i) There is a negation in which not follows the whole expression:

37- I'd rather not stay here alone.

38- You'd better not lock the door.

(ii) In which not follows the first word, especially in negative questions where an earlier statement or assumption is being challenged:

39- A: Wouldn't you rather live in the country?

B: No, I would not. I'd rather live here. (Quirk et. al., 1985: 143)

Section two

2. Preference in Arabic

2.1 Definition

Preference (اسم التفضيل = ism-attafḍīl) in Arabic is nothing but an adjective derived from the verb to refer to two things shared in an adjective and one of them is more than the other with regard to that adjective. For example:

1- خليلٌ أعلمُ من سعيدٍ وأفضلُ منه.

- khalīlun a'lamu min sa'idin wa afḍalu minh.

- * Khalil knowledger from Sa'id and better from him.

- Khalil has more knowledge than Sa'id and better than him too.

There is only one formula for the verbs of (التفضيل = attafḍīl = preference), i.e.

(af'al) and its feminine (fu'la) like [akbar (masculine) = bigger → kubra (feminine) = bigger] and [afḍal (masculine) = better → fuḍla (feminine)].

(Al-Ghalayini, 2004: 135)

2.2 Formulation conditions of (التفضيل اسم) = ism-attafđil) = Preference

Preference in Arabic can be derived from verbs of exclamation as per the following conditions:

- (i) The verb must be of three letters like (فضل = fađala = to be good and علم = 'alima = to know).
 - (ii) It should be positive (not negative).
 - (iii) It should be full inflected verb, i.e. it has three tenses (= present, past, and imperative).
 - (iv) It should be in active (not in passive).
 - (v) It should not indicate verbs of death and mortality like (مات = mâta = to die, and فنى = fanâ = to die).
 - (vi) It should not be incomplete verb like (صار = šâra = to become, and كان = kâna = to be) which they have only two tenses, i.e. past and present.
 - (vii) It should not refer to shortcoming (أعرج = a'raj = cripple), jewelries (أخجل = akhjal = eyelid), or colours (أحمر = ahmar = red).
- (Azzamakhshari, 1999: 288)

2.3 Cases of (التفضيل اسم) = ism-attafđil) = Preference

(i) (أل التعريف) و (الإضافة) (= tajarudahu min *al-atta'rîf wa alidâfa* = Refrain from the definite article 'the' and 'genitive')

When preference has neither definite article nor genitive case, it should be single and masculine in all its cases and the preposition (من = min = from) ought to follow it (Al-Ghalayini, 2004: 137 and Al-Hamlawi, 2005: 61-5) as in the following example:

2- محمدٌ أفضلٌ من خالدٍ.

- Mohammadun afđalu min khâlid.

-* Mohammed better from Khalid.

- Mohammed is better than Khalid.

3- الكهف: (34) أنا أكثرُ منك مالاً وأعزُّ نفراً.

- anâ aktharu minka mâlan wa a'azzu nafarâ.

-* I have more from you money and respected numbers.

- I am more than you in wealth and stronger in respect of men. (Qur'an, Al-Kahaf: 34)

(Al-Hilali and Khan, 1414 A.H.: 391)

(ii) (اقتترانه بأل التعريف) (= iqtirânahu bi *al-atta'rîf* = Joining to the definite article 'the')

When preceded by the definite article, preference noun cannot be followed by (من = min = from) and should agree with its precedent in singularity, duality, plurality, masculinity, and femininity (Qabawa, 1988: 169 and Arrajih, 2000: 90-4):

4- زيدٌ الأفضلُ.

- Zeidun al-afđal.

- * Zeid best.
- Zeid is the best.
- 5- الزيدان الافضلان.
- azzaidâni al-afḍalân.
- * Two Zaid is best.
- The two Zaid is the best.
- 6- الفاطمات الفضليات.
- al-fâtimâtu al-fuḍlayât.

(iii) إضافة النكرة الى النكرة (= iḍâfatuhu ilâ annakira = Adding 'preference' to the indefinite nouns)

If the preference is added to the indefinite noun, it should be singular, masculine, and refrained from (من = min = from) (Jacob, 1988: 62):

- 7- علي أفضل قائد.
- aliyyun afḍalu qâ'id.
- * Ali best leader.
- Ali is the best leader.
- 8- الحسنان أشجع رجلين.
- al-ḥasanâni ashja'u rajulain.
- * The two Hassans bravest men.
- The two Hassans are the most courageous ones.

(iv) إضافة الى المعرفة (iḍâfatuhu ilâ al-ma'rifa = when added to the definite nouns) (Al-Asmar, n.d.: 85-6 and Al-Ghalayni, 2004: 137-8).

When added to the definite nouns, preference noun refrains from (من = min = from) and it has two forms:

a) It should follow its subject in singularity and muscularity.

- 9- علي أفضل القوم.
- aliyyun afḍalu al-qawm.
- * Ali best people.
- Ali is the best of people.
- 10- وَلَتَجِدَنَّهٗمْ أَحْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَى حَيَاةٍ. (البقرة: 96)
- walatajidannahum aḥraṣa annâsi 'alâ ḥayât.
- * You find them guide more of the life.
- And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life.

(Qur'an, The Cow: 96)

(Shakir, 2003: 13)

b) It agrees with what precedes it, i.e., its subject, in singularity, duality, plurality, muscularity, and femininity.

- 10- هذان أفضل القوم.

- hādhāni afḍalā al-qowm.
- * These are best people.
- The two persons are the best of the people.
- 11- وكذلك جعلنا في كل قرية اكابر مجرميها. (الانعام: 123)
- wa kaḍālika ja'alnā akābira mujrimihā.
- * And we make in every village biggest victims.
- And thus we have set up in every town great ones of its wicked people.

(Qur'an, Al-An'am: 123)

(Al-Hilali and Khan, 1414 A.H.: 191)

Section Three

3. Contrastive Analysis of Preference in English and Arabic

3.1 Similarities

1. Referring to the definition, both English and Arabic has the same meaning of preference, i.e., in English: more than, better than, etc., in Arabic: أفضل، أكثر من etc.
2. The word than in English and (من = min = from) in Arabic have the same function in introducing the second part of comparative adjectives to show 'preference'.
3. The English word (than) and the Arabic word (من) can be omitted in preference:

English

- 1- John is most polite of the boys.

Arabic

- 2- علي أفضل قائداً. (English translation = Ali is the best leader.)

4. Comparative and superlative cases are found in both languages:

English

- 1- My room is better/ cleaner than the one next door. (comparative)
- 2- John is the best player on the team. (superlative)

Arabic

- 3- أنا أكثر منك مالاً وأعز نفراً. (comparative) (English translation = I am more than you in wealth and stronger in respect of men.)
- 4- زيد الأفضل. (superlative) (English translation = Zaid is the best.)

5. English and Arabic are common in using the 'preference' particles in the middle of the sentence:

English

- 1- I prefer driving to travelling by train.

Arabic

- 1- خليل أعلم من سعيد وأفضل منه. (English translation = Khalil has more knowledge than Sa'id and better than him too.)

6- 'Preference' particles can be used initially in English and Arabic:

English

- 1- Rather than go there by air, I'd take the slowest train.
- 2- 'Would you prefer tea or coffee?' 'Coffee, please.'
- 3- Would you like some tea or would you prefer coffee?

Arabic

Prophet Mohammed (SAWA) says:

- 1- أَعَزُّ النَّاسِ مَنْ اتَّقَى اللَّهَ وَأَقْوَى النَّاسِ مَنْ تَوَكَّلَ عَلَى اللَّهِ. (English translation = The most honoured among people who is pious, and the strongest among people who depends on Allah.) (World Ahlul-Beit Islamic League: 1432 A. H.)

7. Preference particles in both English and Arabic can be seen at the end of the sentence:

English

- 1- In warm weather, clothes made of natural fabrics are infinitely preferable. (= much better)

Arabic

- 1- زيدٌ الأفضَلُ. (English translation = Zaid is the best.)

3.2 Differences

1. All preference nouns in Arabic are derived from their verbs like: جَمَلَ → أَجْمَلَ, أَفْضَلَ → فَضَلَ, and all of them are adjectives at the same time. On the other hand, English preference particles are of different parts of speech, i.e., some of them are verbs such as: to prefer, would prefer, would love, would like; some others are nouns like: better, preference; or adjectives as preferable and preferential; the subordinator 'rather than', and some others are expressions like give preference to, in preference to, to better, so much the better etc.
2. The word 'than' used to introduce the second part of comparative adjectives in English is a conjunction, while the word 'من' used in the same purpose in Arabic is a preposition.
3. Arabic has some conditions in formulating 'preference', whereas no conditions in English. (see 2.2)
4. Arabic involves certain cases of 'preference' concerning singularity, duality, plurality, masculinity, and femininity between the preference word and its subject but there are no such cases in English. (see 2.3)
5. Most of particles of 'preference' in English consist of two words or more like: rather than, would rather, would sooner, would prefer, give preference to, in preference to, etc. In Arabic, there is only one word to show 'preference' such as: الأفضَلُ، أكابر، أعلم.

6. English (not Arabic) has some particles of 'preference' which are followed by bare infinitive (would rather, rather than, had better), and some others are followed by to+ infinitive (would like/ prefer/ love):
- 1- I'd rather stay in a house than in a hotel.
 - 2- I'd love to be able to travel round the world.
7. There are twenty cases of preference in English compared to only five cases in Arabic.
8. Some preference particles in English are followed by three constructions: Prefer (something/ to do/ doing) and Preferable (to sth/ to doing sth/ to do sth). For example:
- 1- It would be preferable to employ two people, not one. (to do sth)
 - 2- Anything was preferable to tense atmosphere at home. (to sth)
 - 3- He finds country life infinitely preferable to living in the city. (todoing sth)
 - 4- I prefer this coat to the coat you were wearing yesterday.
 - 5- I prefer driving to travelling by train.
 - 6- I prefer to drive rather than travel by train.
9. Only Arabic has duality in preference:
- 1- الزيدان الافضلان. (English translation = The two Zaid's are the best.)

3.3 Conclusions

The results of this study have shown that English and Arabic share some similarities and differences.

In relation to similarities, the two languages are similar in the following:

1. The meaning of 'preference'.
2. The same function of the words (than = English and من = Arabic).
3. Allowance to omission than and من from the context of preference.
4. Existence of comparative and superlative cases.
5. Using of 'preference' particles in the middle of the sentence.
6. Using of 'preference' particles at the beginning of the sentence.
7. Preference particles in both English and Arabic can be seen at the end of the sentence.

As for the differences, the two languages are dissimilar in the following:

1. All the words of 'preference' in Arabic, while preference particles in English belong to different parts of speech.
2. (Than) in English is a conjunction whereas (من) in Arabic is a preposition.
3. Arabic has conditions in formulating 'preference' word but no conditions in English.
4. Certain situations of the 'preference' relating to singularity, duality, plurality, masculinity, and femininity between the preference word and its subject is found in Arabic only.

- 5- Most 'preference' particles in English are consisted of two words. Arabic preference, in contrast, is only one word.
6. English (not Arabic) has some particles of 'preference' which are followed by bare infinitive, and some others are followed by to+ infinitive.
7. English has twenty cases of 'preference' while Arabic has only four.
8. Only Arabic has duality in preference.
9. Only English has two preference particles which can be followed by three constructions (to, to do, doing / sth).

3.2 Recommendations and pedagogical suggestions

- 1- Particles of 'preference' in English and Arabic should be dealt with inside the context not as separate words.
- 2- Teachers, when discussing 'preference', should look at the particles of 'preference' with regard to parts of speech in both languages to be easy for the students to understand and differentiate between them.
- 3- Teachers should invoke students in the classrooms by giving them small quiz after discussing the subject matter, 'preference', to check whether or not understand it.
- 4- It is not sufficient to memorize the 'preference' particles in the two languages by studying them, but the supreme goal is to understand the culture of each language and how to use them in right situations correctly.
- 5- Students should bear in mind that the common features (similarities) between languages paved the way to exchange cultures and bridge the gap to understand each other to live prosperously and peacefully.

The Arabic Consonant and Vowel Sounds in the Present Study

| Sounds | Examples | English meaning |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| ' | 'mîr | prince |
| B | bâb | door |
| T | tamr | dates |
| Th | tha'lab | fox |
| j (researcher changed di to j) | jadîd | new |
| ḥ | ḥadîd | iron |
| D | dâr | house |
| Dh | dhayl | tail |
| R | rajul | man |
| Z | zîr | jar |
| S | safara | travelled |
| Sh | sham'a | candle |

| | | |
|----|---------|-----------|
| ş | şalât | prayer |
| ḍ | marīḍ | patient |
| ṭ | ṭayr | bird |
| ʿ | ʿayn | eye |
| Gh | ghubâr | dust |
| F | fawâkih | fruit |
| K | kalb | dog |
| q | qalam | pencil |
| L | layl | night |
| M | miftâh | key |
| N | nâr | fire |
| H | hâmiş | margin |
| W | warda | flower |
| Y | yarâ | see |
| ẓ | ẓulm | injustice |
| A | walad | boy |
| U | dub | bear |
| l | miftâh | key |
| â | bâb | door |
| û | sûra | picture |
| î | fîl | elephant |

This phonological system was adopted from "Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia"

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